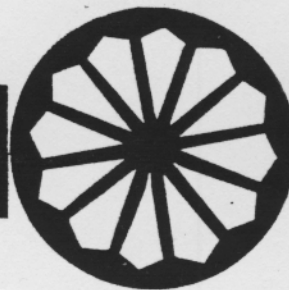


ROMANI UNION
ROMANO INTERNATIONALNO JEK HETHANIBE



PRESIDENT: EMIL SCUKA, MALA STEPANSKA 6, 12000 Prague 2
UK REP: PETER MERCER TEL 01733 347 112, FAX 01733 893 418

Senior Officer
Public Order Section
HOME OFFICE
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT

August 25th 2000

RE: PROPOSED ORDER BANNING HORSMONDEN FAIR

Dear sir,

As the UK representative of the International Romani Union, I am deeply concerned about the application by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for an Order in effect not only banning the 300-year-old traditional Romany Horsmonden Fair but also putting obstacles in the way of a proposed alternative event, namely the Romany Carnival Parade, due to take place 10th September.

I am alerting the President of the IRU, Mr Emil Scuka, and the Presidium elected at the recent 5th World Romani Congress in Prague, to this threat to an essential event in the life of the Romany Community here in Britain. The fairs, like Appleby, Cambridge, Stow and so on comprise a vital element and must be preserved as our heritage.

It seems reasonable to point out that should the Home Office decide, despite our representations, to issue this Order, it will go against the letter and spirit of the Human Rights Act, guaranteeing freedom of assembly and protection against racial discrimination. For we view the proposed Exclusion Order as nothing less than an act of ethnic cleansing. And a somewhat futile one, as the whole charade would have to be repeated again next year, and the year after and so on.

I would urge therefore that you consider delaying the consent to the Order and in so doing allow time for a political solution to be found. I understand the Gypsy Council, along with the Romany Rights Association and the Romany Guild, are meeting with Horsmonden Parish Council and Supt Prior at Ashford on Tuesday, 29th August.

The IRU has NGO status with the UN and would raise this matter (along with others such as the appalling incident in which a Romany girl was apparently abducted and her hand deliberately severed) at international forums and with the media.

Next year, we shall be celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the 1st World Romani Congress (held in London in 1971) and there will be events across Europe drawing attention to anti-Romany repression. That is how we see this attempt to extinguish Horsmonden Fair and it will certainly be an issue for protests of this kind.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Mercer
IRU, UK Representative